

***Budget Hearing for HB 2
House Joint Appropriations Subcommittee on Education
Montana Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES)
and the Extension Service (ES)***

***Testimony of Matt Flikkema, Director
Montana Grain Growers Association***

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the record my name is Matt Flikkema and I am a director of the Montana Grain Growers Association and a grain producer from Belgrade. I am here today to ask and encourage you to adequately fund our Ag Experiment Stations and the Montana State University Extension Service. These agencies are a valuable conduit between our university system and the people of Montana. More specifically, they serve a vital role in delivering ag research and knowledge from the College of Agriculture to our farmers and ranchers across the state.

As the number one industry in the state, agriculture contributes well over 2.5 billion dollars to Montana's economy every year. But input costs have increased dramatically in recent years as the high price of oil affects farmers' fuel and fertilizer costs and limits their profitability. A recent cost of production analysis shows that one area producer on an average size farming operation spent \$27,000 for fertilizer alone in 2002 and \$62,000 in 2005.

Montana producers and consumers alike realize that we need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil supplies. Our ag producers are ready to take on the challenge of providing renewable fuels not only to Montana consumers, but to the nation's consumers as well. Our experiment stations and extension scientists conduct research on oilseed crops like canola, soybeans and camelina that show promise for bio-based diesels and lubricants. And agriculture will be the industry that fuels ethanol development in Montana with new crops and new methods for using existing crops.

Farming is a continually changing industry. Production agriculture deals with problems today that did not exist in Montana as recently as ten years ago. Insect problems like the wheat stem sawfly, Hessian fly, and the Orange Blossom Wheat Midge and diseases like stem rust and Fusarium head blight are all relatively new problems that cause millions of dollars of losses to Montana agriculture every year. Ongoing ag research is critically needed to help Montana grain producers deal with these problems and others as they develop.

Our experiment stations and extension service are currently short staffed and important positions are going unfilled. MSU has recently eliminated the entomologist research position and not yet filled two open weed scientist positions. With increasing demand for research in our farming industry, it is extremely important that we have access to the kind of unbiased data that our experiment stations and extension service provides. MSU is a land grant university and the land for the experiment stations was donated by people who realized the importance of agricultural research. On behalf of Montana Grain Growers, I urge your support of these agencies.